

The Golden Years?

R-E-S-P-E-C-T is what our elderly really need

When the days dwindle down to a precious few, those days are golden. At least that's what the song says, although few people in our society actually believe it.

Dr. William Thomas, Eden Alternative, says that prejudice against old people is currently the only accepted form of bigotry. I believe he's on to something.

We need a collective change of attitude!

For decades, study after study has shown it is more economical for elderly individuals to stay in their own homes where they want to be and where they can live life on their own terms in peace and dignity. Our elected officials may give lip service to the idea but they clearly aren't buying into it.

Because of that, far too many oldsters – who, with only a little assistance, might remain in their homes – are prematurely housed in nursing "homes" where they are termed "residents." Those benign euphemisms cannot conceal the fact that the "homes" are actually "institutions" and the "residents" are "patients" who do not choose to reside there.

Other elderly individuals, though not wealthy, can afford to pay for nighttime assistance in their homes but are unable to find someone willing to do the work, often because the job lacks medical benefits. Perhaps an organization, similar to the Peace Corps, can be developed where volunteers serve as personal advocates and assistants to the elderly for a year or two. The need for such an organization will intensify as Baby-Boomers grow older.

Our society – and especially the medical establishment – must become committed to enabling the elderly to stay in their own homes where they are secure and content. Once that commitment is made, solutions to the challenges faced later in life will be found and implemented.

--Marsha Henry Goff